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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, Dec. 28, 2007

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Child porn suspect faces new charge

Friday, December 28, 2007

By John S. Hausman

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A Muskegon man already facing trial on child pornography counts has now been charged with having sex with an underage boy.

The Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office issued an arrest warrant late Thursday for the already-jailed Mark Edwin Abbey, 50, on a new charge of third-degree criminal sexual conduct with a person between the ages of 13 and 15. Abbey's arraignment was expected today.

Prosecutors said the alleged conduct was oral sex and occurred this year at Abbey's home at 760 Catherine.

Authorities learned of the alleged victim and interviewed him in the course of their investigation after Abbey's arrest on child porn and other charges. The boy was not one of those pictured in Abbey's collection of hundreds of photographs, according to Senior Assistant Prosecutor Raymond J. Kostrzewa.

Kostrzewa said other children have also been talking with investigators about "inappropriate contact" by Abbey.

Earlier Thursday, another boy testified in court: "He asked me if he could take naked pictures of me."

The teen was speaking about an incident that happened in the summer of 2006 when he was 13 years old, at the home of Abbey, a family friend.

The boy said Abbey offered him \$50 per picture if he agreed to be photographed. The boy did so on two separate occasions, he said.

That testimony -- coupled with exhibits of some 200 photographs as well as testimony by Muskegon Police Detective Peter Boterenbrood -- was enough to persuade visiting 60th District Judge Robert Benson to bind Abbey over for trial in 14th Circuit Court on three counts: manufacturing child pornography, a 20-year felony; possessing child porn, a four-year felony; and accosting a child for immoral purposes.

Abbey is lodged in the Muskegon County Jail in lieu of \$500,000 cash or surety bond.

The boy who appeared in court testified that Abbey had not asked him to perform sexual acts -- just pose naked.

At least two other children have been identified from photos found at Abbey's home, Prosecutor Tony Tague said earlier.

The investigation of Abbey began Nov. 15 after a visitor to the man's home was shown some of the pictures, police said. Police executed a search warrant Nov. 21 at his home and seized child pornography and computer equipment, including a Web camera.

Last month, Tague said investigators learned Abbey had enticed children to let him take nude, sexually suggestive photos.

Abbey has a prior conviction for second-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a child younger than 13, committed in 1992. He was in prison from 1994 to 2005 for that.

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Article published Dec 28, 2007

Man caught molesting granddaughter

By Amelia Skimin

DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

A Missouri man is in the Livingston County Jail on a \$500,000 bond after being caught molesting his 4-year-old granddaughter.

Livingston County Sheriff Bob Bezotte said the child's mother had asked the girl on Dec. 22 to take a stack of mail to her grandfather, who was staying in the family's basement. When the girl failed to return upstairs after a couple minutes, the mother went to check on her.

"When she turned on the light, she saw him (molesting) the little girl," Bezotte said.

While the mother called 911, the Missouri man fled in his Chevrolet pick-up.

Sheriff's deputies caught the man on Fowlerville Road near Sharp Road a short time later, Bezotte said.

The man was arraigned Wednesday on a charge of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. He is expected in Livingston County District Court Friday for an exam conference.

The Daily Press & Argus is not naming the grandfather because it could identify his granddaughter. The newspaper does not identify victims of sexual assault.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Amelia Skimin at (517) 552-2847 or at askimin@gannett.com.

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Article published December 28, 2007

Toddler dies from injuries; mother's boyfriend admits to beating youngster



By **LAREN WEBER**
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Within minutes of a severely beaten and burned 23-month-old boy's arrival Wednesday at Toledo Hospital, doctors suspected abuse.

An unconscious Tayvon Evans had cuts on his wrists from being restrained, a burn on his leg, bruising, lacerations, and injuries to his head and chest, police said.

The mother's boyfriend admitted to police he had beaten the child and said the abuse had occurred over the course of several days, according to court records. The toddler died shortly after being taken to the hospital.

"He's a kid. He's 2," said Toledo police Capt. Ray Carroll. "It's beyond comprehension to me."

Mitchell Moore, 20, of 1702 Ottawa Drive and the child's mother, Antionette Hairston, 25, who lives at the same address, were arrested and charged Wednesday with felony child endangering.

They were arraigned yesterday in Toledo Municipal Court and are being held at the Lucas County jail in lieu of \$500,000 bond each.

The couple had been dating for about three months, authorities said.

According to court records, the toddler was burned, beaten with a belt and a plastic hanger, and also punched and hit while his wrists were restrained.

Twenty-three-month-old Tayvon Evans suffered burns, bruises, and lacerations at the Ottawa Drive home of Mitchell Moore, 20, and Antionette Hairston, 25, the boy's mother. They were charged yesterday with felony child endangering and are being held in the Lucas County jail in lieu of \$500,000 bond each. Additional charges may be filed against the couple.

(THE BLADE/LORI KING)

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Mr. Moore told police he abused the child because "he wouldn't behave," Captain Carroll said. The mother apparently had seen the child's injuries, but told police her boyfriend concocted a story of how the child was hurt.

"I don't know what sort of story he could have told her," Captain Carroll said.

Ms. Hairston is accused of failing and refusing to seek medical treatment for her son, according to court records.

A red bicycle was propped up against the couple's central-city house yesterday.

Captain Carroll said police couldn't determine what the child was burned with, but it appeared to be a small iron.

An autopsy on young Evans was performed yesterday by the Lucas County Coroner's Office.

Preliminary results showed "extensive external blunt-force injury," but the cause of death is pending results of toxicology tests and other laboratory tests, said Dr. Cynthia Beisser, a deputy coroner.

Dr. Beisser said the case is being treated as a homicide.

Captain Carroll said additional charges may be filed against the couple after detectives meet with the Lucas County prosecutor today.

Dr. Beisser declined to comment on how the child was burned or what was used to restrain his wrists.

Walt Biegala, a coroner investigator who went to the hospital Wednesday, said some of the boy's injuries appeared to be old, but others were "very fresh."

"[The abuse has] been an ongoing thing, but I don't know for how long," he said.

Ms. Hairston has two other boys, ages 4 and 6, who were placed with relatives, said Dean Sparks, executive director of Lucas County Children Services.

Those children were examined yesterday for any signs of abuse, but Mr. Sparks said he hadn't received any results from doctors.

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A family situation that's just grand

Making A Difference

FLINT TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, December 28, 2007

By George Jaksa

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FLINT TWP. - When Robert and Marjorie Robinson's three granddaughters came to live with them on Mother's Day 2006, the girls talked about going back to their grandparents' house when the family went away from home.

"But now, they talk about going back to 'our' house, meaning their home, too," said Robert Robinson.

That's part of the transition for the Kemmerer girls - Ashley, 15, Amber, 11, and Allison, 9 - who came to live with the Robinsons after a nasty divorce of the girls' parents and their mother's subsequent crack cocaine addiction. Their mother, of the Saginaw area, now is in a Reformers Unanimous program at First Baptist Church in Bridgeport and the girls are feeling more relaxed in their new surroundings.

"It's a lot different than we were raising our own children," said Marjorie Robinson. "You have to be a parent more than a grandparent. You can't just love them and send them home. You have to have discipline."

Robert Robinson, 60, who retired in 2000 after more than 34 years as a General Motors worker, and Marjorie Robinson, 58, a Carman-Ainsworth School District bus driver for almost 28 years, had already raised their four daughters when they assumed legal guardianship of their granddaughters on Jan. 11.

They got a boost when they learned of the Kinship Caregivers program conducted by Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee Counties. Through their contact at Catholic Charities, Greg Wilson, they have learned of programs to help them care for their granddaughters and have participated in programs with other grandparents raising grandchildren.

"If we didn't have grandparents taking care of their grandchildren, our system would be in a crisis without a doubt," said Wilson, 43, prevention supervisor and Kinship Care coordinator. "More and more I am inspired by these folks for what they do."

Wilson said the statistics are staggering. He said nationally 2.4 million grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Michigan ranks 10th in the U.S., with 70,000 grandparents responsible for raising 143,000 children. He said Genesee County has 5,000 grandparents raising their grandchildren, second only to Wayne County, according to the 2000 census.

Over the past year, Wilson said Catholic Charities assisted 180 families and 363 children.

Reasons include young mothers bearing children and lacking parenting and life experiences, substance abuse, incarceration and family situations, such as divorce and domestic violence.

Unlike state-sponsored foster care, the Robinsons receive no state subsidy to care for their grandchildren.

"We'd rather know where they are at," Robert Robinson said. "It gets a little tight, but we make it."

The two younger girls share a bedroom in the family's suburban tri-level home, while the oldest girl has her own room.

"The younger ones had their room painted pink and lime, so that's their room," said Robert Robinson, a 35-year on-call firefighter for the Flint Township Fire Department and timekeeper for almost 20 years at Flint General hockey games. "You know teenagers, they've got to have their privacy, they can't sleep with the little kids."

The girls sometimes accompany their grandfather to home General hockey games and are forming friendships with kids at school. Ashley ran in the Crim Festival of Races' 5K in August and as a sophomore qualified for the state finals last fall in her first year in cross country at Swartz Creek High School.

The family attends Solid Rock Baptist Church in Burton.

"It is much more challenging than it was raising our own children," said Marjorie Robinson, explaining that they keep close rein on the girls. "I am sure other grandparents go through the same thing, it takes a commitment."

But, with monthly visits by Wilson and counseling programs they joined for the girls and themselves, the Robinsons, who have been married for almost 40 years, said they are happy having custody of the girls.

"Knowing where they are and how they are being treated and having them together is what it's all about," said Robert Robinson.


Marjorie Robinson agreed.

"We are doing this because I want our grandchildren to have a decent life," she said. "This is not what we planned to do later in life, but we love them with all our heart and I would not want to have them any place but where we can take care of them."

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Article published Dec 28, 2007

Trial date set for ex-husband

Prosecutor says Benton Harbor man beat up former wife and her boyfriend.

DEBRA HAIGHT
Tribune Correspondent

NILES -- A Benton Harbor man will go to trial in late April for breaking into a St. Joseph home and assaulting both his estranged wife and the home's owner, St. Joseph funeral home co-owner Thomas Starks.

Thomas Simmons, 43, of North Benton Center Road, pleaded not guilty and was bound over for trial on two felony charges and one misdemeanor charge after a preliminary hearing Thursday morning before Berrien County Trial Judge Scott Schofield in Niles.

Schofield is hearing the case after other Berrien County Trial Court judges disqualified themselves because they know Starks.

Simmons is charged with first-degree home invasion, a 20-year felony, and assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder, a 15-year felony. He is also charged with aggravated domestic violence, which is a misdemeanor.

Schofield set Simmons' trial for April 22-24. He said he was willing to adjourn or extend the deadlines for good cause but would not promise to delay the trial indefinitely until the Michigan State Police crime lab could analyze materials sent to them. The only person testifying at Thursday's hearing was Susan Simmons, Thomas Simmons' estranged wife. She recounted the events of Dec. 8 which began with her having dinner with her husband and another couple and ended with her husband allegedly breaking into the Starks' home and beating both her and Starks.

Susan Simmons said she had separated from her husband of 22 years in October and now lives in a St. Joseph area apartment.

She said she had known Thomas Starks since 2001 and is the office manager of the Starks & Menchinger Family Funeral Home. She said she and Starks had only had a romantic relationship for two or three weeks prior to the Dec. 8 incident.

She said she went to Starks' home after the dinner with her husband and they were in a basement bedroom when they heard the front door forced

open and then saw her husband come down the stairs and confront them. She said Simmons hit Starks with his fists and then later kicked him when he fell to the floor. She said Simmons attacked her, throwing her on a bed and hitting her when she tried to stop him from beating Starks.

She said Simmons made a number of threats including to cripple or kill Starks and to come to the funeral home and beat him up in front of others. Simmons also demanded \$250,000 from Starks to buy the Simmons home in Benton Township, she said.

She described Simmons as being agitated and in a rage. The confrontation ended when she was able to get upstairs and go to a neighbor's house to call police.

She said she suffered stretched ligaments in her neck and jaw that may require physical therapy, some broken teeth, and bumps and bruises that have gone away. Starks suffered a broken nose, numerous cuts on his face requiring stitches and now has floaters in his right eye.

Thomas Simmons remains free on a \$50,000 tether bond.



Newsmakers: No charges in stabbing death

By art bukowski

abukowski@record-eagle.com

Newsmakers 2007

This is fourteenth in a series of people, places and incidents that made news in northern Michigan in 2007. For all Newsmaker stories, see Record-Eagle.com/2007newsmakers »

TRAVERSE CITY -- Those with a stake in Alan Hihnala's violent death still await answers and clarity more than five months after the electrician was killed during a domestic dispute.

Hihnala, 27, died of a stab wound inflicted by his wife Michelle during a fight at the couple's East Bay Township home July 8, police said. Michelle Hihnala said it was self-defense, but authorities are still determining if she should be charged.

"We're still waiting for some issues to get resolved by the crime lab and the pathologist," Grand Traverse County Prosecutor Alan Schneider said.

Schneider wouldn't give further details. He won't know if Hihnala will be charged until he sees the crime lab and pathology reports, he said, but he expects to figure things out soon.

"I was hoping we'd have it resolved by now," he said. "I'm looking for something shortly after the holiday season."

Hihnala told Grand Traverse County sheriff's investigators she stabbed her husband once in the upper chest with a large knife in the kitchen of their 741 George St. home. He had physically abused her and ignored her warning to stay away, she said.

Hihnala has been in counseling since the incident and is trying to "rebuild her life," said her attorney, Clarence Gomery. She is splitting time between the Traverse City area and Tennessee, where she has family.

"The waiting has been very trying for my client," Gomery said. "It's kind of frozen her in place."

Gomery believes the crime lab and pathology reports will vindicate Hihnala.

"I'm very confident whatever results they get will be very clear evidence that (she) is not criminally liable for the death," he said.

Alan Hihnala allegedly had a history of abusing his wife, Gomery previously told the Record-Eagle.

The Hihnalas were high school sweethearts who graduated together from Forest Area High School in Fife Lake in 1998, according to past Record-Eagle reports. They married in Elk Rapids in June 2000 and purchased their George Street home in October of that year.

Alan Hihnala attended a trade school after high school and later worked as a journeyman electrician. Michelle is a licensed practical nurse.



Husband arrested in wife's death

Suspect shoots at police, is dropped by return fire

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, December 28, 2007

By Kim Crawford

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FLINT - Enrique "Ricky" Torres and his wife Rebecca didn't always get along, but family members thought the Flint couple's relationship had been on an even keel through the holidays.

"There were times when they were separated, like this summer," said Marcus Burden of Flint, one of Becky Torres' brothers. "But when he was drinking, then there were problems."

About 9 a.m. Thursday, Flint police found Rebecca, 35, shot to death in the home she and her family rented at 3809 LeErda Ave., just north of Pasadena Avenue.

About 45 minutes later, a veteran Flint police officer, having received a description of the white Chevrolet Lumina that Ricky Torres was believed to be driving as a suspect in Becky Torres' slaying, spotted him driving about a mile away.

According to police, Torres, an employee at Advance Auto Parts in Mt. Morris and a onetime Mt. Morris Township firefighter, initially refused to pull over. With another officer arriving as backup, Torres pulled over on Mildred Street near Gillespie Avenue.

Then he got out of his car and fired at one of the officers, according to police. The officers fired back, striking Torres, 35. Torres was hit multiple times, including in the face and shoulder, police said.

He was listed in stable condition Thursday at Hurley Medical Center after undergoing surgery. Police said this morning he was in critical condition. He is expected to face a murder charge in the death of his wife.

The couple has two children - one a teen and one a middle-schooler, said Burden - but they had been staying with their grandparents in Mayville.

"This is so senseless," said Burden about the slaying of his sister.

Other family members and friends echoed Burden's comments, but didn't want to be quoted. But one said Ricky Torres had resigned as a Mt. Morris Township firefighter about a year ago. He and his wife and family had lived in the township for years before moving into the Cape Cod-style house on LeErda.

Relatives said Becky Torres worked as a manager of a blood bank in north Flint. Burden said he or his parents likely would be the guardians for her children.

Police said the events began about 9 a.m. when 911 dispatchers got a call from a man described as Ricky Torres' boss. He reportedly told them of a conversation he'd had with Torres in which Torres spoke of killing his wife.

Flint officers who went to the house on LeErda found her dead in an upstairs room.

QUICK TAKE

Help sought

Police say Enrique "Ricky" Torres was on a cellphone when he was spotted driving after the slaying of his wife. Anyone with information about the call or the slaying is asked to call Flint police Sgt. Jay Parker at (810) 237-6906.

Acting Flint Police Chief Gary Hagler said that although the shooting of Torres was under investigation, he was sure the officers "did what they had to do in order to return safely to their families."

Hagler said that Torres had more than one weapon in the car when he attempted to shoot the officers.

The president of the union that represents Flint officers said the incident demonstrates how dangerous it is for police to patrol the city in one-man vehicles.

"We very easily could be planning an officer's funeral," said Keith Speer, president of the Flint Police Officers Union. "(Torres') shot was very close and if (the female officer) hadn't arrived to back up (the male officer), he could have been hit instead of the other way around."

The officer who stopped Torres was suffering some hearing loss in one ear from being so close to the suspect when he fired, Speer said, but was otherwise all right.

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Article published Dec 28, 2007

Police searching for missing man

By Amelia Skimin

DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Steven Martin Foreman, 50, left his Fowlerville home around 4 p.m. on Dec. 24 and hasn't been seen or heard from since.

When he failed to return home several hours after leaving, his family contacted the Livingston County Sheriff Department. Though a person can't be classified as "missing" until he's been gone for at least 24 hours, the department immediately began trying to track Foreman down.

Several days later, he's still missing.

"We don't believe there's foul play at this point," said Livingston County Sheriff Bob Bezotte.

Foreman regularly takes medication for a medical condition.

"We believe he hasn't taken his medication," Bezotte said. "He may be disoriented and roaming around."

Foreman was last seen driving his burgundy 2001 Ford Taurus from his home on Converse Road. His family did not know where he was headed. He was wearing a quilted, dark-colored flannel shirt, jeans and black shoes. His car's license plate number is 6FWB79.

Anyone with information is asked to call the Sheriff's Department at 517-546-2440.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Amelia Skimin at (517) 552-2847 or at askimin@gannett.com.



Cox: Illegal immigrants can't get Michigan driver's license

12/27/2007, 7:04 p.m. ET

By **DAVID EGGERT**
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Illegal immigrants can no longer get a Michigan driver's license, Attorney General Mike Cox ruled Thursday, reversing a practice that has come under increasing scrutiny post-Sept. 11.

Michigan has been one of eight states to allow undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses. Attorney general opinions are legally binding on state agencies and officers unless reversed by the courts.

It was not immediately known how soon the opinion may take effect or what it means for illegal immigrants with currently valid licenses.

Michigan law prohibits the secretary of state from issuing a driver's license to a nonresident. Cox, a Republican, said it would be inconsistent with federal law to regard an illegal immigrant as a permanent resident in Michigan.

His decision, requested by state Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, could boost momentum for legislation pushed by GOP Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land creating a new driver's license and state ID card.

Only those who are Michigan residents and legally in the U.S. could get the new standard license under the plan.

Land's office was still wading through Cox's opinion and exploring its immediate implications, but it appears to "dovetail nicely" with her license initiative, spokesman Ken Silfven said. Land is attempting to comply with the federal Real ID Act, a law to make driver's licenses more secure and keep them out of the hands of would-be terrorists.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan criticized Cox's opinion, in which he cited national security concerns.

"It drives them further underground," executive director Kary Moss said of illegal immigrants. "If they have licenses, then the state knows about them and has information about them. If there's no form of state recognition, it's essentially a much more invisible population."

The ACLU also has been critical of the Real ID law. It argues the measure will turn driver's licenses into national ID cards and make it easy for identity thieves and private businesses to collect personal data from the cards.

Cox's legal opinion overrules a 1995 opinion by former Democratic Attorney General Frank Kelley. Kelley suggested that denying a driver's license to an illegal immigrant might violate the U.S. Constitution's equal protection clause, according to Cox. But Cox said "there can be no doubt that a rational basis exists for denying driver's licenses to illegal aliens."

Jones, the lawmaker who asked for Cox's legal assessment, said illegal immigrants shouldn't be able to use licenses to find employment — "stealing jobs from Michigan citizens."

Whether illegal immigrants should get licenses has become a major political issue. Earlier this year, New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer proposed to give driver's licenses to illegal immigrants, but he ended up withdrawing that plan after intense opposition.

The issue produced one of the most tense moments of the primary campaign so far, as Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton stumbled in a debate, saying the Spitzer proposal "makes a lot of sense," yet "I did not say that it should be done." Clinton later came out against granting driver's licenses to illegal immigrants.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

It's past time to end HIV travel ban

Friday, December 28, 2007

Twenty years ago, when fear and uncertainty still marked the public's reaction to AIDS, the federal government banned HIV-positive travelers from entering the United States. Since it has long been established that the virus cannot be transmitted through casual contact, the ban serves no public health purpose. It is merely discriminatory, and it has disqualified the United States as a site for some international AIDS conferences. It should be dropped.

A step in this direction is a bill by Sens. John Kerry, D-Mass., and Gordon Smith, R-Ore. They would repeal a 1993 measure that enshrined the ban in federal law. Authority over the admission of HIV-positive visitors and immigrants would return to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Although the bill calls for the department to review the public health aspects of restrictions on people with the disease, some AIDS activists are skeptical that HHS will come up with a policy that opens U.S. doors to HIV-positive individuals. If the bill passes, Kerry and other members of Congress must ride herd on HHS to make sure that any policies it adopts are in line with the U.N. guidelines on HIV/AIDS and human rights, which state that it's discriminatory and unjustifiable on public health grounds to restrict a person's movement or choice of residence based on HIV status. The U.S. is one of just 13 nations that have HIV travel bans.

A particularly harmful effect of the U.S. ban is that it undercuts the efforts of American programs in Africa and elsewhere to end the stigma associated with AIDS.

"There have never been public health grounds for denying people living with AIDS admission to the United States," said Frank Donaghue, chief executive of Physicians for Human Rights. At a time when health officials around the world are doing their best to normalize the treatment of this disease, ending the ban is just what the doctor ordered.

The Boston Globe

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Article published Dec 28, 2007

Scootin' along: Agency program funds wheels, mobility for teen

Sarah Chuby

For the Enquirer

Courtney Barbour, 16, says one of her favorite activities is to put her small dog Gordon — named after NASCAR racer Jeff Gordon — in a basket and take her outside for a walk.

Well, it isn't exactly a walk.

Barbour and Gordon ride in her brand new \$800 motorized scooter, thanks to the program Handle With Care, administered through the Family & Children Services annual fund.

"That scooter has been a godsend for us," said Stacy Walker, Barbour's mother. "We tried so hard to get her a scooter, but our insurance wouldn't cover it. When we were told by Family & Children Services that Courtney was going to get this scooter in September, we just bawled. It really has improved her life."

Barbour, a Lakeview High School sophomore and the self-proclaimed "biggest NASCAR fan," has a rare degenerative condition that causes her sensory nerves to stop working. Up until this year, it only affected Barbour from the knees down. Now she cannot feel anything below her neck.

Walker, during the interview, asked her daughter to touch the table. Barbour touched the side of the gray work table and shook her head.

"I can't feel anything, but I can see that I am touching it."

Local doctors and Barbour's physician at Shriner's Hospital in Chicago continue to run tests but have not come up with a diagnosis.

"It is frustrating and a little scary," Courtney said. "I want to have fun with my friends and do things like everyone else, but I have to adapt."

Courtney said she has switched to plastic cups because she kept dropping and breaking glasses from not holding them tight enough. She no longer can use the stove or oven because she cannot feel if she burns herself. And it can be difficult for her to stay active.

"Before the scooter, I was falling asleep as soon as I got home from school because I was so tired," said Barbour, who previously used a walker. "Sometimes, I'd even fall asleep in school. Now I can concentrate on my friends and school and not on how tired I am."

Barbour said since she started using the scooter, her grades have improved from "Cs and Ds" to "As."

The Handle With Care fund, now in its 21st year, is devoted to meeting clients' needs that are not being met through any other community resource, said Jan Corey Arnett, Family & Children Services development and communication specialist.

The fund has a 2008 goal to raise \$240,000 to provide items such as beds, cribs, new tires and pest control to people in the community.

"The fund has put baby gates in peoples' homes and fixed cars so that people can get to work," Arnett said. "We

want to be the ones who fill clients' needs when there is no other source."

Arnett said that each request from Family & Children Services' staff, on behalf of a client in need, is screened carefully.

Family & Children's Services Clinical Case Manager Lindsay Knapp said even though the nonprofit does so much in the Battle Creek community, this was the first time they received funding for a scooter.

Knapp, who also is Barbour's therapist, said Walker told the nonprofit that Courtney's doctor recommended it, but the insurance wouldn't cover it.

"Courtney has such a great spirit, as do so many of the people that we see," she said. "We wanted to do whatever we could to get her that scooter, and we were successful."

Not only does the Handle With Care fund help families, the Family & Children Services' staff also takes time to listen, Walker said.

Handle With Care even made Barbour's scooter "Dale Earnhardt Jr. red," after finding out how much she looked up to NASCAR's No. 88.

"I used to walk up to the television and give him kisses. I was only about 5 (years old) at the time," said Courtney, who attended her first NASCAR race at age 8. "Mom would laugh because every Sunday, there would be kissing marks all over the screen.

"Looking up to Dale Jr. has really helped me. Now, every time I feel like I want to give up, I think of him," she said. "He's been through a lot (with losing his dad, Dale Earnhardt), and he hasn't given up racing."

In addition to making things tough at school, Barbour said that her condition made it difficult to enjoy her favorite pastime.

But just like the scooter allows for her to go "for a walk" with her dog, the scooter lets the sporty 16-year-old continue to cheer at the races. Now that she has her scooter, Barbour plans to attend some 2008 NASCAR events.

"We feel so blessed to have great organizations like Family & Children Services on our side," said Walker, tearing up as she looked at her daughter. "They are like angels watching over us."

Sarah Chuby is a freelance writer.



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Published December 28, 2007



(Photo by Matthew Dae Smith/For the Lansing State Journal)

Making plans: Jim Ruff, associate director for the City Rescue Mission of Lansing, examines papers in his makeshift office in the gymnasium at the former Maplewood Elementary School on South Cedar Street.

Another \$107,000 needed for renovations

- The City Rescue Mission of Lansing still must raise \$107,102 to cover the cost of renovations that will turn the former Maplewood School into the organization's new Family Center. The mission is accepting donations from churches, businesses and individuals.
- Anyone wishing to contribute should write "Maplewood" in the memo line and send a check to:

City Rescue Mission of Lansing

607 E. Michigan Ave.

Lansing, MI

48912

SOURCE: Lisa Cooper of the City Rescue Mission

City Rescue Mission to expand services for women, children

Housing takes shape in old school

Kathryn Prater
Lansing State Journal

The City Rescue Mission of Lansing by fall 2008 hopes to open a new facility that will allow it to help twice as many women and children get back on their feet.

The new shelter, in the former Maplewood Elementary School, will serve as a refuge and resource for people like Vanetta Pitts, who had nowhere to go when she lost her school food service job and her Lansing apartment.

She is one of 50 women and children living in the mission's current women's shelter, composed of four adjacent houses on South Cedar Street.

"There's a lot of people living on the edge of homelessness, and when something occurs in their life that takes their home from them, they need a place to go," Associate Director Jim Ruff said. "We meet these physical needs in order to bring those with spiritual needs to Christ."

The new Family Center - a transitional housing facility and counseling, educational and religious center - will have the capacity to house 100 children or women.

The shelter has helped 895 women and children this year, Family Center administrative assistant Maggie Fahey said.

"We have run full probably at least 80 percent of the time," said Lisa Cooper, who runs the current Family Center. "As somebody's moving out, we have had people waiting in the lobby to move in."

Even though she plans to move out in February and finish her bachelor's degree, Pitts, 49, hopes she can volunteer at the new shelter, perhaps in the day room - a multi-use space that would include six computers, day care and counseling offices.

Reaching more people

The 30,000-square-foot center at 2216 S. Cedar St. will result in "more people working, more people getting services, more people getting saved, more people getting grounded," Pitts said.

"It's an opportunity just to touch more lives to impact in a way that will be more long lasting for the glory of God."

In the day room, women will be able to train in topics including job seeking, GED preparation, parenting and finances. The building also will include a chapel and a classroom for kitchen training.

"We've seen also the need for helping women and mothers to get in a transitional state to gain some added skills," said Ruff, who is overseeing construction.

Ruff, along with Director of Buildings and Grounds Tim Caldwell and engineer Craig Jansen from C2AE, plans to convert Maplewood's classrooms into 18 guest rooms with bunk beds, dressers, bathrooms and closets.

Two dormitory rooms each will sleep 20 single women. One will be designated for women in substance abuse rehabilitation.

The City Rescue Mission bought Maplewood from the Lansing School District in 2006 for \$200,000. The district closed the school in 2001 because of low enrollment.

New roof, boilers

For renovations, the mission secured a \$500,000 grant through the Federal Home Loan Banks' community investment program, Ruff said. Donations from churches and individuals more than matched that amount, and funds raised total about \$1.14 million. The mission still must raise about \$107,000.

So far, the mission has repaired bricks and installed a new roof and boilers. Slated for replacement are electric, plumbing, ventilation and heating systems. Crews will put in new windows, a new driveway, an elevator and a new entrance off South Cedar Street.

The mission will retain the school's playground, yard and gym, which residents will use for meals and exercise.

Administrative offices, now in one of the mission's four buildings on the 600 block of East Michigan Avenue, will be relocated to the new Family Center. The mission also will move its Free Store, which offers free goods to people living below poverty level, from South Cedar Street to the new facility.

Contact Kathryn Prater at 377-1063 or kprater@lsj.com.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

United Way campaign challenging

Needs grow as money donated decreases

Friday, December 28, 2007

BY LISA CAROLIN

The Livingston Community News

The demand for basic needs like food, clothing and mortgage and rent assistance continues to increase in Livingston County, and that's making this year's United Way campaign more challenging.

"About 40 percent of the calls that we're receiving at the 2-1-1 line are for basic needs," said Donna Gehringer, allocations and assessments director for the Livingston County United Way. "It's because jobs are being cut and overtime is being cut so people's overall income is reduced."

Gehringer said the cost of gasoline and utilities adds to needs as well as the high cost of health insurance. "Only 60 percent of state businesses are offering health insurance to employees compared with 75 percent of businesses 10 years ago," she added.

Jeanne Clum, Livingston County United Way director of development and marketing, said many companies have reduced the number of employees, which means fewer donations. "This campaign is a challenge," she said. "We are comparable to last year at this time, and we do have some companies stepping up to increase their support. We hope people will consider the United Way for year-end giving."

Clum says local agencies are seeing people challenged beyond anything they've ever dealt with.

"It's a state economic tragedy we're dealing with, and it has hit Livingston County significantly," said Clum. "Our partner agencies and human service providers in the community are all stretched with a greater local need. Even so, our community has been very philanthropic and supportive."

Clum encourages people to make a donation online by going to www.lcunitedway.org.

The Livingston County United Way funds 50 community agencies. Last year's campaign raised \$1.57 million. For more information, call 810-494-3000.

Lisa Carolin can be reached at lc Carolin@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at 810-844-2010.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Low-income dental clinic to open

Fundraising effort kicked off Dec. 19 for community site; goal is \$120,000

Friday, December 28, 2007

BY LISA CAROLIN

The Livingston Community News

A dental clinic designed to serve low-income families in Livingston County should be open for patients sometime during the coming year.

A fundraising effort for the VINA (Vision, Integrity, Need, Action) Community Dental Clinic was kicked off Dec. 19 at Brighton's First Methodist Church, where the clinic will be housed.

"Our community is not immune from having its share of need," said Dr. Fred Bonine, a Brighton-area dentist and fundraising chairman for the clinic.

"Southeast Michigan is struggling, and we know through our local health department and charitable organizations that there is an underserved population in Livingston County."

Bonine said he has long wanted to address the needs of local residents who can't afford dentistry and is working along with Brighton dentist Dr. Sam Daniels to garner support. Getting the space in the annex donated by the church was a huge step in making the clinic possible, he added.

The capital campaign has a goal of \$120,000. The first two checks were presented last week from Phoebe Circle, a group at First United Methodist Church, and from Voters Voice along with the Community Unitarian Universalists.

The fundraising is expanding to include corporate and community donations.

"We hope to break ground on the clinic when we reach 20 percent of our goal, and estimate remodeling will take about two months," said Bonine. "We hope to have the clinic running in six months to a year."

The plan is to serve five to 10 patients daily by being open two to three days a week. Bonine said a number of dentists, hygienists, architects, plumbers, movers and lawyers from the community have volunteered their services.

Emergency services will be provided at the clinic for pain, infection, swelling, and fractured teeth as well as service for exams, cleaning and fillings.

To qualify for service, individuals must live in Livingston County, have no dental insurance, and have an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Lisa Carolin can be reached at lc Carolin@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at 810-844-2010.

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Meals for needy available at school

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, December 28, 2007

By Holly Klaft

Journal Staff Writer

FLINT - The International Academy of Flint will provide free and reduced-price meals to children in need through the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Children 12 or younger, migrant children 15 or younger and older disabled children enrolled in the academy may be eligible for the program.

Children who are on Family Independence Program assistance or live in households using food stamps are automatically eligible for meal benefits.

If a family's annual income falls below \$17,797 for a family of two, \$22,321 for a family of three or \$26,845 for a family of four, meals may be free for their children.

If a family's annual income falls below \$25,327 for a family of two, \$31,765 for a family of three or \$38,203 for a family of four, children may be eligible for reduced-price meals.

- Holly Klaft

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DTE says gas customers will pay less for heat

December 28, 2007

BY MARGARITA BAUZA

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

MichCon, DTE Energy's natural gas utility, is reducing rates for all of its 1.2 million customers across the state.

The company announced Thursday that it will drop the price of natural gas from \$7.50 to \$7 per thousand cubic feet starting Tuesday.

Advertisement

A typical residential customer will save about \$35 over the remainder of the heating season, said spokesman John Austerberry.

"The cost that we pay for gas has gone down," Austerberry said. "It's a combination of the market price for gas going down and the fact that we have fortunate geology in Michigan that allows us to buy and store gas underground in summer months."

MichCon serves customers in 50 counties. About half of those customers, 646,000, are in Wayne County. About 188,000 are in Kent County, and 5,500 are in Oakland County.

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Friday, December 28, 2007

Bed, bike, clothes make special gifts

Single mother thanks agencies for giving her 12-year old daughter a holiday to remember.

Charles E. Ramirez / The Detroit News

Kathy Conner said Christmas this year was one she'll never forget.

The 41-year-old single mother from Royal Oak said the efforts of The Detroit News and a few charities to help the needy this holiday made it extra-special.

"It was a blessing and a half," she said. "Christmas was just overwhelming."

Conner is one of more than 5,000 Metro Detroit residents who contacted Helping Hands -- a collaboration between The News and five local charities to assist low-income families during the Christmas holiday.

Conner said she received a number of gifts from readers of The Detroit News and the Salvation Army.

She said the most cherished gifts were a new bed, a new bike and new clothes for her 12-year-old daughter, Angel.

"I just want to thank everyone who donated something," she said. "Christmas this year was just out of this world."

Conner was forced to quit working about 13 years ago when she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. Even though the tumor dissipated after six years of treatment, Conner remained unemployed.

This year, The Detroit News got a hand for the Helping Hands program from The Capuchin Soup Kitchen, The Information Center Inc., the Old Newsboys' Goodfellows Fund of Detroit, The Salvation Army Eastern Michigan Division, The United Way for Southeastern Michigan and Volunteers of America Michigan.

Under the program, needy families contacted the United Way's 211Call Center. The United Way then referred callers to the agencies in the partnership for help.

Meanwhile, The News promoted the effort with articles about some of the needy families.

"I think the publicity of Helping Hands really helped a lot of people get assistance this year," said Sari Klok-Schneider, director of the Goodfellows Fund of Detroit.

Demand for help from the Goodfellows this holiday, she said, was the highest she has seen since she started with the charity 11 years ago. The 211 Call Center referred more than 800 people to the Goodfellows this holiday, according to the United Way.

"I've never seen the kind of volume that we've seen this year before," Klok-Schneider said. "It was astonishing. The phone literally did not stop ringing."

The United Way is still in the process of gathering and analyzing data about how many people received aid from the Helping Hands program, said Kristen Bolds, research associate for the United Way.

But she said preliminary figures show the nonprofit referred a total of 5,464 people to the five Helping Hands agencies from its 211 Center between Oct. 1 and Dec. 25. It's too early to tell how much money was raised, she said.

"We don't have numbers for last year to compare with, but the need appears to be increasing," she said. The 211 Center received about 24,000 calls last month alone -- up 75 percent from the same month in previous year, said Bolds.

Bolds also said the organizations involved in Helping Hands plan to meet next month to review the data and discuss what worked well under the program and what improvements could be made.

Loretta Smith was another Metro Detroiter who received some help from Helping Hands this year.

"Another family adopted mine this Christmas," Smith said.

You can reach Charles E. Ramirez at (586) 468-2905 or cramirez@detnews.com.



Friday, December 28, 2007

2008 industry outlook

THE YEAR AHEAD: Tough times drawing to a close

But more pain expected before gain

Louis Aguilar and Sofia Kosmetatos / The Detroit News

Michigan's economy in the past few years has often been described as gripped in a "one-state recession," and while no one predicts a rose garden for the state in 2008, there are at least some signs this may be the last tough year before the state begins a slow rebound in 2009.

But not before more pain.

As it has since 2000, Michigan will lag -- badly -- behind the national economy, which by itself is expected to be sluggish at best. Locally, tens of thousands of job losses will continue, particularly in the auto industry. Home values may continue to drop, and the number of foreclosures should grow.

The impact will be deep and wide, from the declining budgets of state and local governments to the tightening of consumer spending.

"But a crisis is a terrible thing to waste," said Patrick Anderson, founder of Lansing's Anderson Economic Group, "and we've been facing crisis in Michigan long enough that we've begun to tackle some of the structural issues to turn around."

Detroit's auto industry in particular made great strides this year in addressing structural problems as a result of groundbreaking new labor contracts with the United Auto Workers and other cost-cutting measures.

But as University of Michigan economist George Fulton says, recently released data show that, alongside the losses, the state's economy consistently produces large job gains in education and health services.

"There must be some vitality in an economy that can continue creating jobs even though it's not keeping pace with the leakage," Fulton said. "If the leaks can be plugged, the state's economy and labor market have the capacity to grow and prosper. And therein lies both our challenge and our opportunity."

What's ahead for five key Michigan industries:

Economy

Next year may be Michigan's final year of big economic pain before the state slowly starts to bounce back, according to five prominent economists.

For the eighth straight year, the Great Lakes State will bleed jobs, primarily manufacturing work. As many as 51,000 workers will see their jobs disappear in 2008, according to a forecast by University of Michigan economists Joan Crary, George Fulton and Saul Hymans. The state's unemployment could hit 8.2 percent, a level not seen since 1992.

By the bleak Michigan standards set so far this decade, next year's jobs losses in auto manufacturing will be moderate -- about 21,000, the UM economists said. That will trickle down to moderate job losses in other sectors, including construction, professional and business services and trade, transportation and utilities, predicts Comerica Inc. chief economist Dana Johnson.

Not all sectors will continue to slide. Education and health services will add 10,000 jobs next year, the UM forecasters believe. The tourism industry should grow as the high price of gasoline and even the slow U.S. economy keep people closer to home for vacation, according to Anderson, who also sees the potential for high-tech auto jobs and work created by research at state universities.

The national economy will not slide into recession, the economists contend, which helps what most believe will be Michigan's final year of decline before a soft rebound begins in 2009.

Auto industry

Next year was supposed to be a new, leaner start for Detroit's auto industry.

Instead, grim predictions of dwindling U.S. light vehicles sales are casting a dark cloud over the recent progress made by Detroit's Big Three to improve their competitiveness against lower-cost foreign rivals, including reaping savings from groundbreaking labor contracts brokered this year with the UAW that will shift retiree health care costs to the union, among other cost savings.

The struggling housing industry, the squeeze on credit, and high oil prices will challenge automakers in the new year. Most analysts predict U.S. vehicle sales will plunge by 500,000 units or more compared to 2007's estimated level of 16.1 million. Forecasts range from CSM Worldwide's estimate of 15.8 million to Ford Motor Co.'s prediction of 15.2 million, based on calculations for the first six months of next year.

If auto sales drop by half a million or more, the impact will be wide and deep, including likely consolidation of automotive suppliers, fewer dealerships and lower state tax revenue. Suppliers tied closely to SUV and truck components, where sales are dropping most steeply, are likely to be hard hit, said David Cole, chairman of the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor.

Automakers have laid off nearly 100,000 workers in the last two years, and announced more cuts this fall along with more buyouts. General Motors Corp. will offer buyouts to 5,200 of its 34,000 hourly workers starting in January. Chrysler LLC and Ford Motor Co. workers recently learned they'll be on extended layoff early in the year.

Energy

However you heat your house or run a vehicle, expect to pay higher prices.

Assuming normal weather, a typical Michigan resident can expect his or her heating bill from November to March 2008 to hit about \$764, a \$15.28 increase from last winter, according to the state's semi-annual Energy Appraisal report by the Michigan Public Service Commission.

The mix of higher prices and increased usage could cause natural gas bills to increase by 8 percent this season compared to last winter, according to the energy report. Residential natural gas prices now are 2 percent higher than last winter. Residential heating oil prices are up sharply because of increases in crude oil prices.

Crude oil's run to nearly \$100 a barrel in the second half of 2007 increased the price of gasoline and many consumer goods, and many analysts think prices will average around \$75 a barrel in 2008. But due to geopolitical risks and supply, the cost of motor gasoline and diesel will remain volatile, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

Both gasoline and diesel prices are projected to average well over \$3 per gallon nationally in 2008, with gasoline prices peaking at more than \$3.40 per gallon next spring, the EIA projects.

Road and bridge builders are seeking a 9-cent increase in Michigan's 19-cent gas tax. The increase would be phased in at 3 cents a year for three years and is being pitched by the Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Association to collectively generate \$1 billion annually in money for road work.

But Gov. Jennifer Granholm opposes raising the state's gas tax. She's expected to sign a bill in January that sets up an Alternative Road Funding Task Force made up of legislative leaders and leaders from manufacturing, tourism and public transportation to look for other ways to pay for infrastructure improvements. Her State of the State address in January will likely spell out ways she will try to strengthen Michigan's economy through alternative energy development.

Housing

This time last year, there was cautious optimism the housing market, both nationally and locally, might stabilize.

Now -- though it hardly seems imaginable -- things could get worse for at least half of 2008 before improving, according to home builders, economists and investors. The impact of the subprime mortgage mess is far from over and that will mean more foreclosures and declining home values, experts contend.

The National Association of Home Builders expects the national housing market to pick up in 2009 after hitting bottom in the middle of next year, according to David Seiders, the NAHB's chief economist. In Metro Detroit, which lags behind the national economy, home values may continue to decline for most of next year.

In March, the number of adjustable rate mortgages in the United States will peak, with \$110 billion resetting to higher monthly payments for homeowners, said Drew Sygit, a certified mortgage and equity planner for Meadow Mortgage in Bloomfield Hills. Locally, that will result in more foreclosures, Sygit said. Other experts share in the low expectations for 2008. More than 90 percent of publicly traded home builders have negative outlooks or are under review for downgrade, Moody's Investors Service said in a recent report. And 33 percent of building materials companies have negative outlooks, according to the report.

Before the market bottoms out, local counties and municipalities will likely be forced to slash budgets, which will mean fewer services. In January, local governments learn how much their revenues will drop due to falling property tax assessments, said Patrick Anderson, founder of Lansing's Anderson Economic Group.

The one bright spot is rentals, which will continue to go strong, as people ride out the housing storm.

Health care

Metro-Detroit health care systems will continue their race to attract customers with new hospitals, expansions and renovations in 2008.

They will spend millions on projects that cater to patients with pampering atmospheres and the latest technology. Industry experts are keeping a close eye on two new suburban hospitals: St. John Providence Park Hospital in Novi, set to open in the summer, and Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital, scheduled to open in Spring 2009.

The Novi hospital, for example, will look and feel like a modern hotel, with dual corridors (one for patients and visitors, another for moving materials), large patient rooms with room service, flat screen TVs and pull-out couches for visitors.

Despite renovations being made at Detroit hospitals, they stand to lose doctors and patients -- and with them, income -- to the new hospitals.

"We'll see changes next year that we haven't seen anything like in the last several years," said Adam Jablonowski, executive director of the Wayne County Medical Society. The addition of two new suburban hospitals comes as Flint-based McLaren Health Care grows in Metro Detroit. In northern Oakland County, McLaren is developing a \$600 million health care village it hopes will include a 200- to 300-bed hospital. The industry will also keep a close eye on Beaumont, Grosse Pointe, formerly Bon Secours Hospital, which Beaumont Hospitals bought in 2007. It's the Royal Oak-based health system's first major entry into Wayne County.

Across industries, companies will continue to grapple with rising health care costs, even though the rate of increases has slowed. Businesses will focus more next year on more aggressive wellness programs in the workplace and will continue to pass some of the cost increases to employees.

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Published December 28, 2007

State unions: UAW and SEIU took the lead by recognizing Michigan's tough times

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Two state employees unions stepped up to help address financial problems during their contract talks earlier this year.

Members of UAW Local 6000 and SEIU Local 517M negotiated and accepted contracts that, while austere, recognize the difficult situation state government and its workers confront.

Three other unions rejected the terms contained in those contracts, but last week the state Civil Service Commission adopted the contracts anyway, after going through a procedure for resolving the impasse.

The terms include no raises in the fall of 2008, a 1 percent increase in 2009 and a 3 percent increase in 2010.

Employees in the unions also will pay higher costs for medical coverage and for copays, a change that could save the state millions.

Accepting modest raises and increased pass-through of medical costs has been a trend in private industry for some time, whether workers are unionized or not. It reflects the economic realities of cutting costs while competing in an increasingly global marketplace.

Certainly it's not easy for state workers to agree to compensation plans that, when confronted with cost of living increases, mean their dollars likely won't stretch as far.

Still, state employment remains an attractive option in the marketplace.

State workers deserve thanks for putting forth good efforts in tough times. And the UAW and SEIU deserve thanks for showing leadership in negotiating contracts that reflect the reality of those times.

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